

REMARKS

In the Office Action, claims 1-4, 7-9, 16, 17, 32-34 and 41-43 were rejected, and claims 18-20 were indicated as allowable. Applicants thank the Examiner for indicating claims 18-20 as allowable. Independent claim 16 has been amended to substantially incorporate the language of directly dependent claim 19 and, accordingly, independent claim 16 and dependent claims 17, 18 and 20 should be in condition for allowance. Additionally, claims 1, 4, 16 and 41 have been amended, claims 3 and 19 have been canceled without prejudice, and claims 1, 2, 4, 7-9, 16-18, 20, 32-34 and 41-43 remain pending in the present application. All claim amendments are fully supported throughout the written description and figures of the specification.

Claims 1-4, 7-9, 32 and 33 were rejected under 35 USC 102(b) as anticipated by the Rabe reference, US Patent No.: 3,253,842. This rejection is respectfully traversed, although certain amendments have been made to independent claim 1 to clarify aspects of the invention.

The Rabe reference discloses a joint 14 for use in joining sections of solid propellant rocket engine cases. The sections are not automatically interlock when engaged, but rather require a separate mechanism that must be inserted to hold the sections together. Specifically, the joint 14 includes a pair of identical members 16 and 18 which form the adjacent ends of cylindrical members 10 and 12. The identical members 16 and 18 each have T-shaped fingers 20 with heads 22 defined by shoulders 24. The fingers are spaced circumferentially about the cylindrical members and define large spaces or slots 26 opening into smaller spaces or slots 28 having "greater width than the adjacent finger heads 22." Therefore, the fingers 20 of one member 16, 18 can be slid through the spaces 28 of the other member 16, 18. (See column 2, lines 14-23). Thus, the fingers on one member freely slide in and out of the spaces formed in the other member with no spreading of adjacent fingers and no automatic interlocking engagement. The adjacent members 16, 18 of joint 14 are only held together through the use of a separate mechanism in the form of a plurality of rectangular keys 32 inserted into spaces 30 between shoulders 24 of adjacent finger heads 22. The rectangular keys 32 are inserted to prevent axial separation of the joint members. (See column 2, lines 24-36).

The Rabe reference fails to disclose various features of the currently pending claims. For example, the cited reference does not disclose a receiving extension with a connector opening having a narrow outer portion and a wider inner portion; and a corresponding insertion extension that is axially inserted to spread "the narrow outer portion until the expanded region is captured in the wider inner portion to automatically interlock the insertion extension and the receiving extension" as recited in amended, independent claim 1. The cited reference also fails to disclose a "sand barrier" disposed along the connector system connecting the first and second tubulars such that the sand barrier is "positioned to block influx of particulates into an interior of the first and second tubulars" when positioned in a wellbore, as recited in independent claim 32. In the Rabe reference, the cylindrical ring 40 is positioned along an interior of a rocket engine joint 14 to prevent the escape of combustion gases during operation of the rocket engine. Certainly, an interior ring of a rocket engine cannot be construed as a barrier to the influx of sand from an exterior region to an interior region of tubulars in a wellbore. Furthermore, Rabe discloses O-rings 40 positioned along the exterior of cylindrical ring 42 which demonstrates the system is not designed as a sand barrier to block the influx of particulates. Accordingly, the rejection of these claims should be withdrawn.

Claims 2, 4, 7-9 and 33 ultimately depend from one of the independent claims and are patentable for the reasons provided above with respect to the independent claims as well as for the unique subject matter recited in each dependent claim. Accordingly, the subject claims are believed to be in condition for allowance.

Claims 16 and 17 were rejected under 35 USC 102(b) as anticipated by the Campbell reference, US Patent No.: 5,924,745. Although Applicants disagree with this rejection, independent claim 16 has been amended to facilitate allowance of this application. Specifically, claim 16 has been amended to incorporate the language of directly dependent claim 19, which was indicated as allowable. Accordingly, the rejection is no longer applicable, and claims 16 and 17 are in condition for allowance.

Claims 32, 33 and 41-43 were rejected under 35 USC 102(b) as anticipated by the Huber et al. reference, US Patent No.: 6,059,042. This rejection is respectfully traversed, although independent claim 41 has been amended to clarify the language.

The Huber et al. reference is directed to a completion insertion and retrieval under pressure apparatus that utilizes a snaplock connector 10. Connector 10 comprises a fork sub 10a and a breech lock sleeve 10b. Fork sub 10a has six fingers with buttress grooves machined on the outside diameter that mate with internal buttress grooves on breech lock sleeve 10b when the six fingers are inserted into the breech lock sleeve. However, there is no disclosure or suggestion of a sand barrier positioned to block particulates from moving into the interior of the apparatus. The reference does not suggest sealing the snap lock connector 10 against inward flow and provides no sand barrier to block potential influx of particulates.

Specifically, the Huber et al. reference does not disclose or suggest a "sand barrier disposed along the connector system" and "positioned to block influx of particulates into an interior of the first and second tubulars when positioned in a wellbore" as recited in independent claim 32. Additionally, the reference does not disclose or suggest a slide cover "slidably mounted" on a first tubular, wherein the slide cover may be "slid relative to the first tubular and into engagement with the second tubular to secure the second tubular to the first tubular" as recited in amended, independent claim 41.

Claims 33, 42 and 43 ultimately depend from one of the subject independent claims and are patentable for the reasons provided above with respect to the independent claims as well as for the unique subject matter recited in each dependent claim. Accordingly, claims 32, 33 and 41-43 are believed to be in condition for allowance.

In view of the foregoing remarks, the pending claims are believed patentable over the cited references. However, if the Examiner believes certain amendments are necessary to clarify the present claims or if the Examiner wishes to resolve other issues by way of a telephone conference, the Examiner is kindly invited to contact the undersigned attorney at the telephone number indicated below.

Respectfully submitted,



Robert A. Van Someren
Reg. No. 36,038

PO Box 2107
Cypress, TX 77410-2107
Voice: (281) 373-4369

Date: July 12, 2005